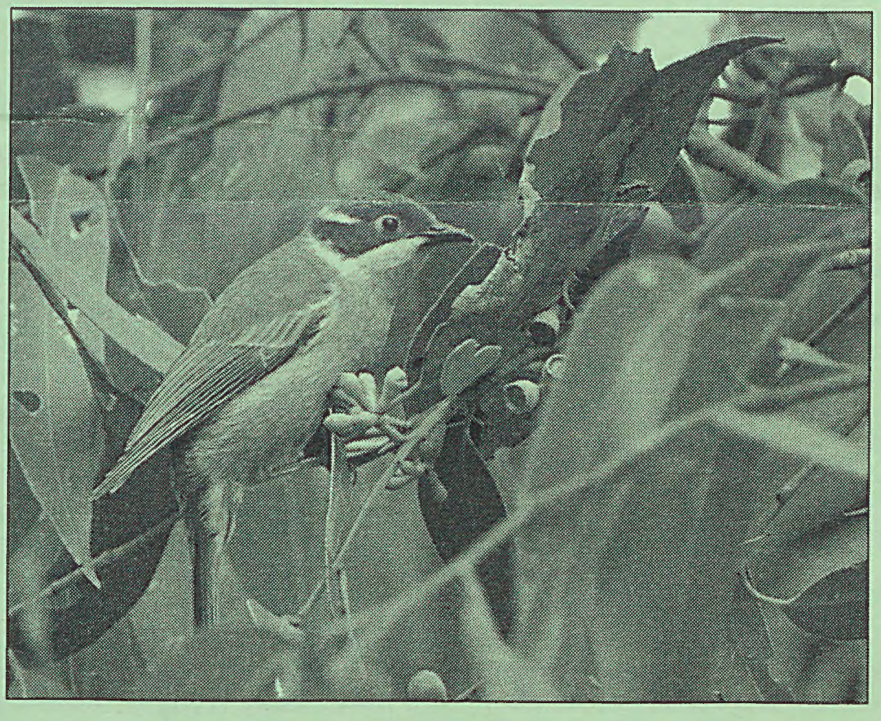
GEELONG NATURALIST

MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF THE GEELONG FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INC



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September 2010

President's report

...Deborah Evans

What's on?
August was a busy month, perhaps too busy, with some GFNC activities suffering from clashes with other related activities, and the absence of a number of members at the ANN get-together. Still, there is a lot less boneseed in the district than there was in July(!) and a lot more seedlings planted in various reserves to take advantage of the recent rains.

September sees the start of the Spring activities. Our September excursion will be a conventional one, but October and November will be biodiversity surveys. The members that attended the excellent Habitat Hectare training at Ocean Grove Nature Reserve will be keen to see how we can apply what we learned to our surveys. The Habitat Hectare technique is only one of a range of survey methods that can be applied, and we will need to decide when best to use it rather than other methods—in conjunction of course with our ongoing mammal, invertebrate, herpetological and bird surveying.

Boneseeding
Sadly there were only six of us at the August boneseed pull, and although we managed to locate and remove most (hopefully) of the scattered flowering plants on the uphill side of the track, there are thickets downhill that could have done with a much larger team. Thanks to Rob Beardsley for organising, Rosemary Turner for maintaining the post at the carpark (in the hope of signing on the wished-for stream of volunteers!), Peter Turner and Polly Cutcliffe for their sterling efforts and Peter Williams for joining us at lunchtime for some much needed moral support.

Committee news
What with one thing and another, the already under-strength committee is now looking very sparse. David Flanagan's other commitments prevent him from continuing as a committee member and Peter Williams would like to make a progressive handover of the Membership Officer position to a new person. The committee thanks Peter for the excellent job he has been doing managing our memberships and David for his range of contributions to the committee activities.

So, we are looking for two more general members to boost the committee strength and a volunteer to look after our memberships. As the Membership Officers position is fairly quiet at this time of year, it is an excellent opportunity to make the transfer before next year's renewals start.

We would also like to hear from anybody who would be prepared to take on the task of organising our material for the Angair Wildflower Show display, as well as people to staff the stand on the Saturday—a nice one-off job for somebody who would like to contribute but cannot commit to an ongoing position.

All we need is some volunteers! And speaking of volunteers ...

Celebrating our 50th anniversary
April 2011 will mark 50 years since the first meeting that officially re-created the Geelong Field Naturalists Club on 16 April 1961. The committee has decided to hold a celebratory dinner in April next year, and is keen to produce a publication to mark the 50 years. We are looking for volunteers to make up two sub-committees, one to organise the dinner and one to work on a suitable publication. Please contact me if you would be interested in either of those activities.

In the meantime, we are working to collect and scan a complete set of all the GFNC publications since 1961. We have also started tracking down the publications of the first GFNC which existed from 1891 to the early 1930s. While we have located various sets in different libraries, we have not yet determined the best way to obtain copies for ourselves so that Club members have ready access for research.

How can **you** help with these various projects?

Tonight...

...Kathy Powers will be talking about the Brisbane Ranges before and after the fires.

At the October meeting...

...John Edmonds will be talking about bees.

We welcome

Paulina Ramos from Anglesea
Glenda Shomaly from Torquay
Simon Howland from Newcomb
Dr & Mrs Blake from Newtown

to the club and wish them a long and happy association.

GFNC website

Any observations (plant, mammal, bird, reptile, invertebrate etc.) can be emailed to the GFNC email address or phoned to Barry Lingham (5255 4291) so that they can be incorporated onto the site frequently.

GFNC Web page: http://home.vicnet.net.au/~gfnc/
e-mail address: gfnc@vicnet.net.au

Members are encouraged to arrive early at general meetings.
The room will be open at 7.15 p.m. to allow members to chat to other members and visitors.

The photo on the front cover, by Barry Lingham, is of a Brown-headed Honeyeater at Anglesea in August.
The photo on the back cover, by Lorraine Phelan, is of a moss-covered rocky rise in Floating Islands Reserve. Full report on p. 8.

What's up

...Dean Hewish

The month of August featured an attractive arrangement of planets in the evening sky. Venus, Mars and Saturn made a fairly compact triangle that changed size and shape throughout the month as the planets moved. Venus was by far the brightest, Saturn the second brightest and Mars the faintest. Mars is receding from us in its orbit and is rapidly fading from its brightest at closest approach, which occurred in February. Saturn is not at its brightest, because its rings are still almost edge-on to us. In the middle of August, Mercury was also in the evening sky near the grouping of planets, but was much closer to the horizon than the others. On the evening of the 13 August, the Moon was very close to the group of planets and the event was noteworthy enough to be mentioned in the newspapers, although viewing was spoilt by bad weather. The group of planets is now dispersing and progressively moving into the twilight.

The sun is gaining new sunspots at a high rate and it seems that the new solar cycle is already shaping up as a surprisingly intense one. Northern hemisphere residents have been reporting spectacular aurorae. Aurorae are caused when storms of charged particles released by active regions on the Sun's surface are funnelled towards the Earth's poles by the magnetic field. When these storms hit the Earth's outer atmosphere they excite the rarified gases to emit light. We are not especially well placed to view southern aurorae, since the Australian mainland is too far north. However, it is not impossible to view one from the Geelong region when there is an especially intense geomagnetic storm, but you do need dark skies. We have even seen a bright aurora from Bacchus Marsh, in the days when there was much less light pollution. Members living close to the southern coast are more likely to view one of these amazing events, but be aware that fishing boats with bright lights near the horizon can produce false 'aurorae'. Watch for brighter patches in the sky to the south that may tend to condense into vertical rays of light. The brightness will flicker and change quite rapidly and it may not be visible for long. The colour can be greenish, often with red tints. Advance warning of a possible aurora is helpful and internet sites give solar activity reports.

A new koala baby!

...Janine Duffy

We have our first koala baby in the You Yangs research population for the season! 'Emma', a mature female, has produced what looks to be a healthy, large and confident joey. They were seen together on 1 August north of the Lower Picnic Ground. Interestingly, Emma was seen on 9 July this year without any sign of a joey, so at that time he must have been in the pouch.

First emergence of koala joeys is expected between six and seven months of age, but the first few journeys outside of the pouch are usually brief. Also, from our own experience, mother koalas seem to be very capable of hiding young joeys. So in wild, unhabituated populations of koalas, these first tentative outside steps are probably not often witnessed by people.

When first seen, Emma was feeding on a River Red Gum, and her joey was clinging to her belly. He was reaching for leaves as his mother ate, but I didn't see him put any in his mouth. He was quite active—wriggling around a lot, changing position often—which is why I say that he seems confident. He also seemed quite plump, and fairly large for his presumed age. So we can assume that this sighting was not his first emergence from the pouch. From his size. I estimate that he is about seven months old, so he was probably born in December 2009 or early January 2010. Baby koalas start ingesting pap* between 172 and 213 days of age and this continues for about a month. They start eating gum leaves shortly after they start taking pap. So it's not unusual that Emma's joey was reaching for leaves—he may already be trying to eat them.

The one other koala baby we have monitored closely in this area emerged on or before 24 July 2008. He was Pitta, the first joey of Pat—one of our most frequently seen koalas. He was smaller, slimmer and much more tentative than Emma's joey was at 1 August. We think Pitta was younger on that first sighting—perhaps closer to six months old. We were lucky enough to see the pair often, and we monitored his development closely. After that first sighting, Pitta was in and out of the pouch for the next month, but after 25 August he was clearly seen every time we saw Pat.

Pitta would have been born around January 2008. Until 20 November mother and son were always together, and often touching or holding each other. But by the start of December Pat was vigorously resisting his attempts to suckle, and was seen to smack and bite at him at times. We suspect that Pat was pregnant again (if so, this joey did not survive), which could explain her sudden determination to wean him. In January 2009 Pitta was independent and usually seen in a different tree to his mother. He disappeared about the end of January 2009 at 12 months old, presumably to find a home range of his own.

It will be very interesting to monitor the development of Emma's joey over the next year. We would appreciate hearing of any sightings of koalas with young, particularly around the Turntable Drive area. Emma's main home range is north of Big Rock Road and north of Lower Picnic Ground, but any koalas seen with young in the You Yangs are of great interest to our study. If possible we would love a couple of photographs showing the nose and face of the mother, and/or her back and lower flanks plus a photograph of the whole tree she is in, and a bit of detail about the location (or a GPS reading). Send to janine@echidnawalkabout.com.au or to Janine Duffy, PO Box 370, Port Melbourne 3207 PH: 03 9646 8249. If you do see Emma, please be very quiet and move slowly around her—she is a nervous little thing. We always try to stay at least 10 m away from any wild koala, particularly nervous ones like Emma. Getting closer just makes them climb up away from you. If there are a few of you, stay together on one side of the tree—nervous koalas become more stressed the more people move around at the base of their tree, particularly if those people separate. The best policy, if you can, is just to wait and give her time to relax.

*Pap: soft, micro-organism-rich material produced by a mother koala, probably in her caecum, and eaten by a baby koala. This is considered to be the mother's way of introducing digestive organisms to the baby koala's gut.

Reference:

Martin, R. & Handasyde, K. (1999) *The Koala, Natural history, conservation and management*, Second Edition, UNSW Press.

Out and about
The merits of dung

...Valda Dedman

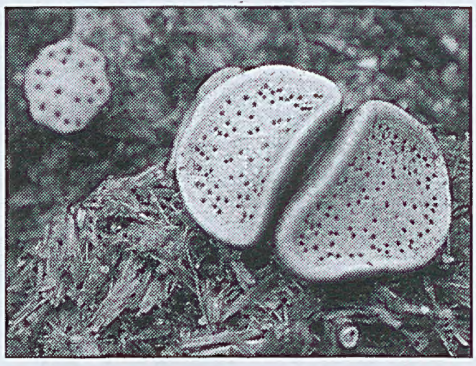
Scats, droppings, pellets, poo, excrement, manure, dung—call it what you will. There's so much to learn about it.

Bacteria break down carnivore and omnivore dung but herbivore dung, which is produced in greater quantities, often needs fungi to help break down the plant matter it usually contains. Nematodes, mites, beetles and flies also help; the weather may play a part. Not that dung always disappears easily. If you get your eye in as you wander through the bush, you'll begin to see it everywhere.

Look at this photo. The fungus has had a bite taken out of it, so its spores will pass through the gastrointestinal tract of the animal that ate it and end up in its faeces, where they may produce mycelium and fruit. What is it growing on? What is that substrate composed of? You can see its size. It was found at Inverleigh Common.

Dung fungi, coprophilous fungi

Fungi are often found growing in dung. Species such as Dung Buttons *Poronia erici*, tiny white pitted discs, are found on dung of marsupials, rabbits, sheep, goats, less often on cow or horse dung. Gilled species such as *Coprinopsis nivea* grow on herbivore dung, as does *Conocybe tenera*. Some *Coprinus* species can conduct chemical warfare against the hyphae of other species in the dung and so come to dominate the finite resource. *Paneolus* and *Psilocybe* species are also coprophilous. Of the cup fungi, the Cannonball Fungus *Sphaerobolus stellatus* is commonly found on herbivore droppings. Its tiny star-shaped fruit shoot out brown 'cannonballs' by turning themselves inside out. *Cyathus stercoreus* grows in colonies and produces minuscule shiny black 'eggs' in open 'nests' and is found on dung or on rich soil. *Cheilymenia raripila* forms orange discs to 2 mm across.

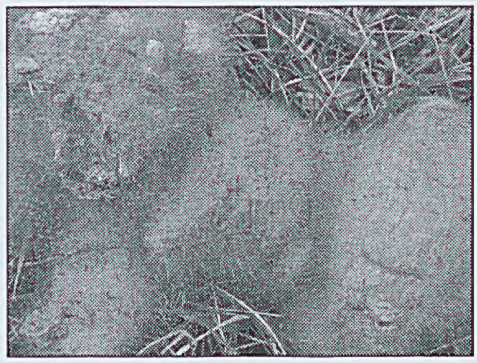


Dung Buttons *Poronia erici*

Cheilymenia raripila

If you incubate a dung sample you may see a succession of fungal fruiting bodies appear over several weeks, but they do not necessarily reflect the order in which fungal spores colonised the dung. The spores of many dung fungi have very thick walls which weaken during passage through the gut, making them ready to germinate once deposited with the animal's droppings. Other spores are waiting on the ground. The first fruiting bodies may be from those species whose mycelium can grow fastest and make best use of the available nutrients.

Dung is rich in nutrients (makes good fertiliser, too) and a good medium for fungal growth. Fungi may attack it when it is fresh. This photo (by Rosalind Smallwood) shows such a fungal growth on dog poo. Filamentous Ascomycotina such as *Podospora anserina* may be the first to colonise dung. Some animals such as potoroos feed almost exclusively on truffle-like fungi whose spores pass out in the animal's droppings. Dung fungi spores survive passage through the gastro-intestinal tract and many must pass through the digestive system of an animal before they can reproduce. Some are accidentally consumed, settling from the air; most true coprophilous fungi are specifically adapted to dung.



The nutrients in dung are readily available. Plant material contains carbohydrate, lignin and cellulose and microbiota associated with its digestion. Fresh dung is rich in fatty acids, vitamins and amino acids, is moist and has a close to neutral pH.

Identifying dung

Each animal species produces its own characteristic dung. Kangaroos and wallabies have squarish scats. A wombat will leave its scat on a slight elevation such as a stone. A fox's scat most resembles a dog's; Trevor Pescott discovered a fox dropping on top of a toadstool! In autumn a fox's scat may contain blackberry seeds and be stained purple. Cats usually scratch soil or litter

Fungus on wallaby dung

over their excrement, but animals in the wild rarely dig to bury their faeces.

Wombat scats never and koala scats rarely contain hair, since these animals do not groom like kangaroos, whose scats contain numerous hairs. Wombats mark their burrows and their territory with their square scats. Each wombat's scat has a unique odour, a valuable identification aid for a species that has poor eyesight. Tasmanian Wombat poo has been made into paper!

Echidna scats contain ants and soil and the colour varies with the colour of the soil. Ringtailed Possum scats can be found beneath trees and contain fine leaf particles. The scats of quolls are large, have a rank odour and are found at their latrine sites; those of the New Holland Mouse are very tiny. A Water Rat's scats are found near its 'dining table', and may contain fish scales, bits of shell, bone and hair. Scats of the Agile Antechinus have been found in crevices in bark on tree trunks. It also makes smelly piles in its nest hollow. Bandicoot scats contain insect fragments. They are found near their conical diggings and near their nests and in the runways leading to them. Rabbits have two different kinds of droppings. The first, passed inside the burrow, is only half-digested and is eaten. The second, round and dry, is left as a territory marker some distance from the burrow.

Shape, size and texture are guides to scat identity. Birds and reptiles have very concentrated droppings that always bear a trace of white uric acid. The Thorny Devil's scat is composed almost entirely of ants on which it exclusively feeds. A python's scat contains fur. Mammal scats are more regular in shape but will vary according to whether the animal's diet has been wet or dry. In arid areas scats tend to be drier because many animals reabsorb moisture before eliminating solid waste. These scats may have a glazed appearance, from the mucous needed to expel them from the body. Carnivores' scats are generally round in cross-section and have a pointed end; herbivores' scats may be in small sections and there will be more of them per animal.

Scat analysis

Scat analysis reveals much about an animal's diet. Herbivore dung contains a large proportion of grass and seeds and also gives an indication of habitat. One study found that Western Grey Kangaroos consumed 32 different plants. Analysis of the scats of predator species such as dogs and foxes is being used as a tool in a survey of the endangered Baw Baw Frog. Collection and analysis of the fox scats in Tasmania will give an indication of the impact of this recently discovered feral pest on native animals. Scat analysis is being used to determine the diet of the endangered Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby. DNA analysis of whale poo is being used to study whale diet. Fossil dung 30 million years old from extinct megafauna has been found in Argentina.

Emu droppings are often large and soft; they may look like a splash of green paint and may contain many seeds. The seeds of Emu Bushes Erempohila are said to be difficult to germinate unless they have passed through an emu. Plants germinated from seeds in scats can reveal vegetation patterns and the spread of weed species.

Dung beetles

Most dung beetles, which are of the family of scarab beetles, feed on dung, both in their adult and larval phase. However, many have a varied diet that includes mushrooms, decomposing leaves and other rotting matter. Adult dung beetles have mouth parts which are specially adapted to feed on liquefied material and can break down a dung pad very efficiently by burying the dung underground to use when breeding. Some make dung balls which they roll away, often for many metres, into their nests.

Australia has several hundred species of native dung beetles that make use of the fibrous dung produced by kangaroos, wallabies, wombats and other native mammals. Not enough is known about them. Many may have very small distribution ranges; they may be endangered; some areas may be rich in species whilst others are poor. We know more about the introduced species than our own.

Australian dung beetles were not able to cope with the huge amount of dung (estimated at 12 million cow pats annually) created by introduced cattle and buffalo which resulted in a massive bush and buffalo fly problem. Between 1969–84, a team of CSIRO Entomology scientists, led by Dr George Bornemissza, introduced more than 50 species of dung beetles to Australia from Europe and Africa to deal with the dung and consequent fly problem. By 1989 26 species of dung beetle had become well established, some having built up large populations. The activity of dung beetles disturbs and buries fly breeding sites and recycles nutrients into the soil.

The Flat African Dung Beetle, found in southeastern Australia, was accidentally introduced, probably with farm stock. It is now common in urban areas where it feeds on dog and even human dung. It has been released in large numbers by some councils to help with the control of dog faeces in public places.

Bird pellets

Then there is regurgitated waste—pellets coughed up by owls and raptors. They are composed of bones and hair and other indigestible parts and reveal not only what the bird has eaten but what animals may be present in an area. Magpies also regurgitate pellets; they contain hard animal and insect parts and seeds. Barn owls feed almost exclusively on mice. Their pellets are used in science classes to demonstrate skeletal structure and can even be bought in teaching kits in the United States, where owls can also be kept legally as pets.

References

Morrison, R.G.B. (1981) *A Field Guide to the Tracks & Traces of Australian Animals*, Rigby, Adelaide.

Triggs, B. (1984) *Mammal Tracks and Signs*, O.U.P., Melbourne.

www.anbg.gov.au/fungi/ecology-dung.htmu

www.dungbeetle.com.au/csiro_dungbeetle_project

www.planetsaferesearch.com.au

ANGAIR Wildflower Weekend & Art Show

Saturday & Sunday 18 & 19 September 2010

Memorial Hall, McMillan St, Anglesea

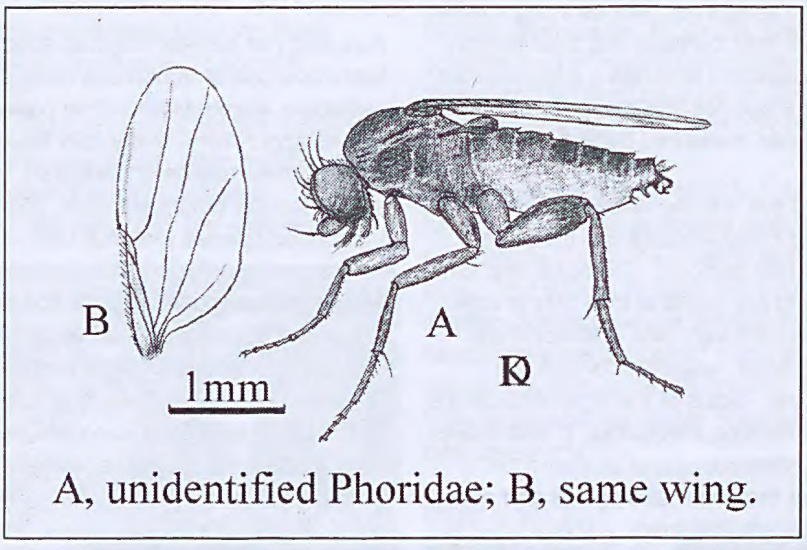
Guided wildflower walks & bus tours included.
Indigenous plants, art and craft for sale. Kids activities
Adults $5, pensioners/students $2
Children under 12 yrs free.

Enquiries 5263 1085 or 5263 3131.

A minute fly—unidentified Phoridae, Diptera

...Dave King
kingdf@optusnet.com.au

Introduction
A series of fifteen pitfall traps were deployed in the Inverleigh Flora and Fauna Reserve, (38º 04´S 144º 02´E), over the period 14–17 July 2010 with the object of sampling terrestrial invertebrates during concurrent mammal trapping. Results of invertebrates collected are listed below.



A, unidentified Phoridae; B, same wing.

The list includes a significant number of flies, most of which were small to minute. The subject fly was in number relatively large.
A search of the literature and other media failed to determine the identity of the fly. Using the diagnostic venation of the wing it was established to be an unidentified member of the Family Phoridae, described as a very aberrant group, (Colless 1991).

Although common, their minute size, together with the habit of living amongst ground cover foliage and litter, precludes them being readily observed. Larvae of this fly appear in general to be scavengers in decomposing organic material and fungal matter.

Description
The general appearance is as shown in Figure A, with a distinct humpback perspective. The head capsule supports a pair of large multi-faceted eyes and a group of three ocelli on the apex. Antennae are similar to the muscoid form; the terminal segment is bulbous and carries a simple anterior style. The area between the eyes upward to the vertex has a series of stout bristles.
An enlarged mesothorax, producing the humped appearance, carries the single pair of wings shown in Figure B. The wings have a somewhat primitive form of venation and are without a pterostigma. The strong radial veins meet the costa at about half way along the wing anterior margin; all the other veins are weaker. Attached to the costa are a series of short macrotrichia (Gk.*macros*, large; *thrix*, hair). At rest the wings are held over the body.

In place of a second pair of wings there are a pair of halteres (Gk. *halter*, weight) small capitate bodies acting as balancers during flight; these are attached to the metathorax. The thorax is black like the dorsal surface of the abdomen that has seven readily observed segments; the other two segments are much reduced and incorporated in the terminalia.

Legs are relatively long with distinct lines of short dark setae. The tibia of the second pair of legs possesses a strong and long spur at the posterior apex. Rear legs are well developed; the femur is substantial which is indicative of a natural habit of hopping or leaping amongst the ground vegetation and litter. The femur carries a pair of spurs on the apex. All tarsi terminate in a pair of simple claws.

References
Colless,D.H. (1991) *The Insects of Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne

Terrestrial invertebrates—Inverleigh Flora and Fauna Reserve

A total of fifteen pitfall traps were deployed in two sites in the Reserve. Each trap consisted of a plastic cup charged with a mixture of 70% alcohol and ethylene glycol (vehicle anti-freeze).

No significant difference in the variety of species from the two sites was noted, therefore, the accompanying list is a combination of results. Of the specimens collected, virtually all were very small and would not represent, in mass, anywhere near an adequate food supply for small mammals.

The most representative, in terms of species numbers, were beetle larvae and small flies of micro size.

Common Name	Order	Family	Genus	Species
Badge spider	Araneida	Heteropodidae	Neoparassus	calligaster
Spider	Araneida	Angiopidae	Araneous	?
Spider	Araneida	Dysderidae	Dysdera	australionsis
Lynx spider	Araneida	Oxyopidae	Oxyopses	verabilis
Spider	Araneida	Ctenidae	?	?
Beetle larva	Coleoptera	Eletridae	Hapatisus	?
Beetle	Coleoptera	Staphylinidae	?	?
Rove beetle	Coleoptera	Staphylinidae	Thyreocephalus	?
Beetle larva	Coleoptera	Carabidae	Neria	?
Beetle larva	Coleoptera	Caribidae	?	?
Fly	Diptera	Phoridae	Apocephalus	miricauda
Fly	Diptera	Sciaidae	Sciara	?
Fly	Diptera	Lauxanidae	Homoneura	proximella
Fly	Diptera	Perisomatidae	Perisomua	?
Bush fly	Diptera	Muscidae	Musca vetastissima	
Fly	Diptera	Phoridae	?	?
Fly	Diptera	Mycetaphilidae	Mycetophila	propia
Fly	Diptera	Sciaridae	Sciara	?
Ant	Hymenoptera	Myrmicinae	Pheidole	?
Wasp	Hymenoptera	Ichneuminae	?	?
Ant	Hymenoptera	Myrmicinae	Monomorium	'kiliani'
Scrub tick	Ixodida	Ixodidae	Ixodes	holocychus
Earth worm	Lumbricina	Lumbricidae	Microcolex	dubius
Lacewing larva	Neuroptera	Osmylidae	Kempynus	?
Harvestman	Opiliones	Triaenoniphidae	Triaenobius	?
Centipede	Symphyla	?	?	?

Hooded Plovers on the Victoria coast: Grainne Maguire
Bird Group Meeting, 19 August 2010

...Dean Hewish

Grainne Maguire is Manager for the Beach-nesting Birds project, 2006–2012, administered by Birds Australia. She has previously presented an overview of the project to the Bird Group, but agreed to return and describe recent results and progress.

Hooded Plovers are a coastal flagship species that use ocean beaches as their habitat. They are not uppermost in most people's minds when they visit the beach, since beaches are generally considered to be places of recreation. However, beach-nesting birds are indicators of beach health. They are lost from beaches when the habitat loses its integrity through invasion by weeds, erosion or development. To some, beach-dependent birds are considered to be 'stupid' but they are very highly adapted to the beach environment and its natural threats. They have only experienced human onslaught in the past 60 years and have had little time to adapt to the effects of human activity.

The presence of Hooded Plovers signals that the beach habitat is in good condition but they often remain in areas where they are unable to breed successfully, such as beaches heavily impacted by people and their dogs. This means that population counts do not reflect the conservation state of the birds since the number of breeding pairs may be overestimated. It is therefore essential to monitor the species' breeding output if population declines are to be recognised ahead of time. Long-lived, low recruiting species like Hooded Plovers are susceptible to catastrophic population declines that are difficult or impossible to predict and reverse.

'One major advance in promoting Hooded Plover breeding success has been the introduction of chick shelters to beaches containing breeding pairs. '

Hooded Plovers occur as dispersed pairs along the Victorian coast. Pairs managed by Birds Australia produce half the fledged young for the state's population, so it becomes essential to invest in management of single pairs to maintain a stable population. Most of the research has already been done. We know how to protect the birds and there is no excuse for losing this species. The aims of the project are to assess threats to Hooded Plovers and monitor breeding success along the Victorian coast; to establish links between volunteers, community groups and land managers; to advise land managers about best practice management techniques; and to ensure that pairs on busy beaches are properly looked after. In addition, research is carried out on new techniques for improving breeding. Education efforts raise awareness in school children and communities about beach-nesting birds. In addition, project members establish communication between bird researchers and environment managers across the Victorian coastline.

At present, 120 volunteers monitor 90 pairs at 50 sites along the Victorian coast, although the number of volunteers varies somewhat between years. The results of their research so far show that Hooded Plovers on busy beaches which are managed have similar fledging success to remote sites, but when the birds are unprotected, they have only a 5% chance of breeding success.

The 2009/10 breeding season results showed that considerably larger numbers of Hooded Plover chicks were fledged in far west Victoria and on the Bass Coast than in previous years, but that success across the remainder of the coastline was similar to or worse than that measured in previous years. On the Shipwreck Coast, five pairs were monitored and produced four fledglings (two pairs). This area contains relatively undisturbed beaches requiring minimal management but does have predators and high tides in localities where cliffs limit the birds' retreat. On the Otway coast, three or four pairs were monitored, with seven nests (two hatchlings), but no fledglings. However, there has been a recent Landcare grant to bait foxes and to provide pet control education. There has also been thorough fencing of nesting areas. The district contains a relatively small local community so there is great potential to effectively raise awareness and to encourage school involvement. Major issues in this district are: dogs off the leash, foxes and the lack of knowledge of chick fates through poor data collection.

On the Surf Coast, two Hooded Plover pairs were monitored and produced two fledglings (from one pair). Another four chicks were lost close to fledging. Positive indications for this area were regular monitoring (twice week), an excellent Committee of Management (with strong links between policy and the on-ground works) and the setting up of a Twitter site with local identity 'PR Plover'. A major issue in this district is the presence of newly identified predators: cats and rats.

The Bellarine Peninsula had seven nesting pairs that produced four fledglings (two pairs: for one pair, the first time breeding in at least five years). Positive factors for the area are that four sand dunes out of seven are now permanently fenced and also the activities of a sizeable and dedicated volunteer group. However, there remains inadequate knowledge of the COGG animal management plan. Beach 40W falls in a management 'grey area' and there is currently no enforcement of this RAMSAR site. Horses and dogs are regularly seen on this beach.

On the Mornington Peninsula, 28 breeding Hooded Plover pairs produced seven fledglings (four breeding pairs). Positives factors are: a wardening program with volunteers on roster working one to two hours each per weekend and also a group of dedicated Rangers. Pressure from volunteers to the Minister have resulted in beach use changes such as a trial 'no dogs' area. The main issue is the small number of volunteers available to monitor nests, so Birds Australia staff spend one day per week assisting Parks Victoria. This remains an area where prompt management is vital. There is non-compliance with dog regulations at Rye and St Andrews, particularly by surfers and locals who know the times when the Rangers are not present.

The Bass Coast and Venus Bay population of Hooded Plovers was 19 pairs, producing 22 fledglings. This area has a strong Friends group with its own funding. There is a strong relationship between Parks Victoria and the volunteers. The district is close to the Phillip Island Nature Park, so there is greater scope for collaboration. The district has prompt management and good data collection. Recently, a major coastal development, (the Cape Paterson 'Ecovillage') was successfully opposed. However local issues are: dogs off lead, pipi collectors (currently being

addressed in a joint effort between Parks Victoria and the Fisheries Department), and predators.

In far-west Victoria, there were 29 fledglings from 30 breeding pairs. This district has an enthusiastic and active local conservation community with an active Friends group. There is strong school involvement and the local councils are keen to participate. However, the main issues are a lack of regulations and no current management plan for Parks Victoria reserves. Parks Victoria in the district is understaffed, with only five staff for the Childers Cove to Port Fairy stretch of coastline. A federally funded recreational vehicle regulation project has unfortunately been stalled until after state election. The district has historically been unregulated so there are illegal vehicles, horses above high water mark and dogs running unleashed. There is an urgent need for action in this district including education, the establishment of student projects, promoting changing of attitudes to beaches, the spread of knowledge of threats to Hooded Plovers and the acceptance of management and regulations.

The Beach-nesting Birds project also advises higher education institutions in Victoria and assists graduate students carrying out projects related to beach nesting bird ecology.

One major advance in promoting Hooded Plover breeding success has been the introduction of chick shelters to beaches containing breeding pairs. These simple plywood shelters provide nearby cover for the chicks to run to when disturbed, shelter from extreme weather and refuge from predators. Both chicks and adults have been observed to use the shelters. Breeding success has been shown to dramatically improve on beaches where artificial shelters are provided. With only natural shelter there was a 10.0 % fledging success rate, versus 81.8 % for broods which had artificial shelter. Strict guidelines have been established for the use of artificial shelters. They are used in sites where natural shelter is limited. Ideally, three or four shelters are placed in a breeding pair's territory, halfway between the base of the dunes and the high tide mark. The shelters are dug in leaving a height of 15 cm above the sand. It is important to never place shelters over nests because they restrict the parent's view of approaching predators. Volunteers placing the shelters must make sure they sight all chicks before entering the area, so that they do not accidentally step on them.

Grainne concluded by acknowledging all the volunteers, land managers and community groups that had assisted the project. Photographs shown in the presentation were provided by Glenn Ehmke.

This interesting and informative update on the efforts to preserve one of our important and threatened bird species was much appreciated by those GFNC members who braved a cold, wet and blustery evening to attend the meeting.

Snippets from the past

...Rob Ganly

For some time now I have been researching the *Newsletters* of our Club from its inception in 1961 till August 1994 when it became *The Monthly G.F.N.C. News*, which in turn was incorporated into our current monthly *Geelong Naturalist* in May 1996.

As predominantly a 'birdo' I was fascinated by some of the interesting snippets of Australian bird information, both local and from afar, that our members reported and I decided to submit a periodic column to our *Naturalist* of unusual reported bird information from the period 1961–1996 in the hope that you will gain as much enjoyment as I have from these 'snippets from the past'. To set the ball rolling, here are the first few!

***Newsletter* 151 July 1978, p.6**

Three new birds have been recorded for Victoria in the past few weeks:

Royal Penguin at Apollo Bay: alive when found.
White-tailed Bosun-bird at Mallacoota: alive when found.
White-quilled Pygmy-Goose —shot on a lake near Wangaratta.

***Newsletter* 182 May 1981, p.7**

Clamorous reed-warbler, 0.75 km from Barwon River (C.Morley)

Gilberts Whistler in Bannockburn Forrest (I.McIntyre and L.Chappell)

***Newsletter* 185 Aug 1981, p.3**

Valda Dedman told of an Olive Whistler feeding on 'bird pudding' in her garden.

Moolapio Coastal Field Day

Thursday, 16 September 2010

11.30 a.m. to 4.00 p.m

Windmill Road, Point Henry (*Melways* 453, G3)

Trevor Prescott is a locally renowned ecologist and expert on the many coastal bird species found in the area.

Sue Longmore is the Coastal Coordinator for the Bellarine Catchment Network and co-author of the popular *Coastal and Inland Flora of the Bellarine* booklets.

Greening Australia with support from Alcoa of Australia and Caring For Our Country proudly presents the Moolapio Coastal Field Day. Guest speakers will take you on a guided walk, allowing you to explore and discover the uniqueness of our valuable coastal saltmarsh flora
and fauna.

This is a free event. Lunch and other refreshments will be provided. Due to the past popularity of similar events, early bookings are essential.

Please RSVP by Friday 10 September Lyn Willcock, Greening Australia (Vic) Email: lwillcock@gavic.org.au

Reptile and amphibian (Herpetology) report

...Trevor Pescott

Marbled Gecko	2	15/02/08	House near Marriner's Falls, Barham River, Otways.	JDr
Marbled Gecko	1	10/08/10	Victoria Terrace, Belmont.	TP
Bluetongue Lizard sp	1	26/07/10	Queens Park area of Highton.	LLi
Eastern Bluetongue Lizard	1	16/08/10	Victoria Terrace, Belmont.	TP
Tree Dragon	1	22/08/10	Lilydale House, Batesford.	TP
Common Froglet		30/07/10	Bambra Wetlands.	TP
Common Froglet		05/08/10	Little River Picnic Ground, Brisbane Ranges.	SIn, TP
Southern Brown Tree Frog		05/08/10	Little River Picnic Ground, Brisbane Ranges.	SIn, TP
Southern Brown Tree Frog		13/08/10	Yaugher.	TP

Observers: JDr, Jocelyn Dexter; LLi, Leanne Lindgren; SIn, Shona Innes; TP, Trevor Pescott

Marbled Gecko: when Jocelyn Dexter began removing some old, warped weatherboards on the north side of her home near Marriners Falls at the head of the Barham River Road, she disturbed a lot of wildlife including several bats and various insects. But the real surprise was a large Marbled Gecko that escaped alive, and a smaller one that was accidentally killed. The latter was preserved for later positive identification. This happened in February 2008. Although geckoes have been found at Yaugher also in the Otway Ranges, it was assumed that they had been inadvertently carried from Belmont where they are common. How they got to the Dexter home is a mystery.

Bluetongue Lizard: Leanne Lindgren found a dead baby lizard on the drive of her home in the Queens Park side of Highton on 26 July, and she raised the question—are the reptiles out earlier this year? Perhaps they are, for an adult Eastern Bluetongue was found squashed on the roadway in Victoria Terrace, Belmont, about two weeks later.

Tree Dragon: as we removed boneseed on the Lilydale House property at Batesford, I disturbed a tiny dragon. It had the skin on one side of the face sealed over the eye, but this may later be removed when the lizard sheds its skin.

Southern Brown Tree Frog: there were only a small number to be heard during the late morning at the Little River Picnic Ground, but the chorus at night at Yaugher was very loud with many frogs calling. It has been a wet August in the Otways, and there seemed little doubt the frogs were preparing for a very productive breeding season.

Mid-week Bird Group excursion
Buckley Falls, Queens Park, Barwon River, Moorabool River area
26 August 2010

...Bryant Attwood

A very small group set off in not particularly good birding weather. Most birds were sheltering low down in bushes but we found 32 species including a large number of beautiful Silvereye (Tasmanian form) and smaller flocks of Red-browed Finch.

Chestnut Teal	Eastern Rosella	Australian Magpie
Pacific Black Duck	Red-rumped Parrot	Pied Currawong
Spotted Dove	Fan-tailed Cuckoo (calling)	Little Raven
Crested Pigeon	Superb Fairy-wren	Magpie-lark
Nankeen Night Heron	White-browed Scrubwren	Eastern Yellow Robin (calling)
Straw-necked Ibis	Brown Thornbill	Silvereye
Dusky Moorhen	White-plumed Honeyeater	Fairy Martin
Galah	Red Wattlebird	Common Blackbird
Corella sp.	New Holland Honeyeater	Red-browed Finch
Rainbow Lorikeet	Crested Shrike-tit	House Sparrow
Crimson Rosella	Grey Shrike-thrush (calling)	

Harlequin Mistletoe *Lysiana exocarpi* flower (right) and germinating seed (left). The seed has been deposited on a horizontal branch of the host plant after passing through the digestive tract of a Mistletoebird The sprout has already developed a small haustorium to attach to the bark of the host. Photos: Lorraine Phelan

Mammal trapping—Floating Islands Reserve
26–29 August 2010

GPS 54709628E, 5752743N, alt 157m. DSE trapping permit 10005048

...Trevor Pescott

The dry lake bed and grounded 'floating islands'.

Photo: Lorraine Phelan

The Floating Islands Reserve, managed by Parks Victoria, is in the Stony Rises about 17.5 km west of Colac beside the Princes Highway. The name of the reserve comes from floating, vegetated 'islands' of peat, the largest of which supported trees and shrubs and the smallest covered with sedges. They were formed in the late 1920s when fire burnt through a deep depression, leaving damp patches of peat unburnt on bedrock. When the depression filled with water, these floated, forming 'islands' that drifted around the lake according to the wind direction. But since the 1990s, the lake has dried out and the 'islands' seem now firmly attached to the bed of the lake, and it seems unlikely they will float even if the lake does refill.

The reserve was created in three parts, the first an area of 3.2 ha of freehold donated to the Crown in 1960 and managed as a Koala Reserve. The second was 17.3 ha purchased in 1980 by the then Ministry of Conservation. The same year, the Victorian Conservation Trust purchased 64 ha of adjoining land and this was handed to the Department of Conservation and Environment in 1990. The total area now covers about 84.5 ha.

The vegetation is typical of the Stony Rises, with an open canopy of Manna and Swamp Gums, and a shrub layer of Blackwood, Cherry Ballart, Tree Everlasting, Shrub Violet and Scented Paperbark. The ground cover is Austral Bracken and grasses, mainly exotic annuals. The now-dry lake-bed is covered with native nettle and some sedges.

Method

Fifty small Elliott traps were set in two meandering lines each of 25 traps: 1–25 were set around the eastern side of the lake, commencing below the main car-park on the highway, 26–50 were set from Hawks Nest Road, the eastern boundary of the reserve, about 300 m from the highway, along a valley beside towering basalt 'rises'.

Bait used was the standard mix of peanut butter, honey and oatmeal.

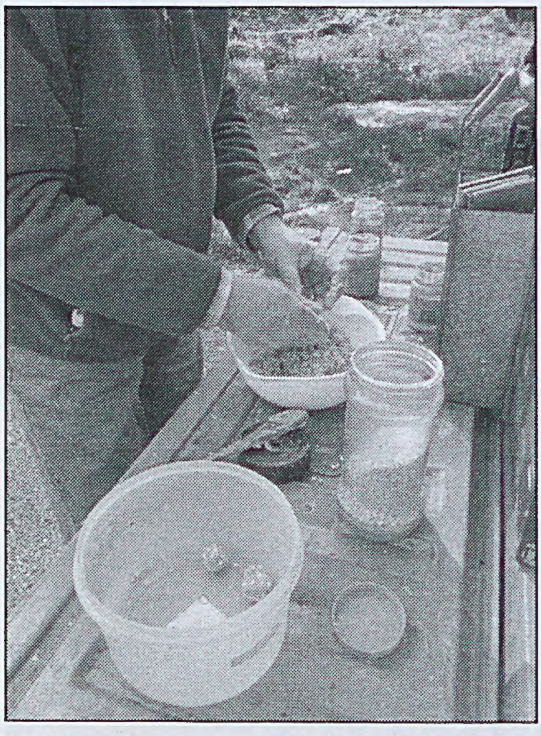
The weather was cold, with some rain.

Results

Dusky Antechinus *Antechinus swainsonii* adult female, trap 37 (27/08/10).

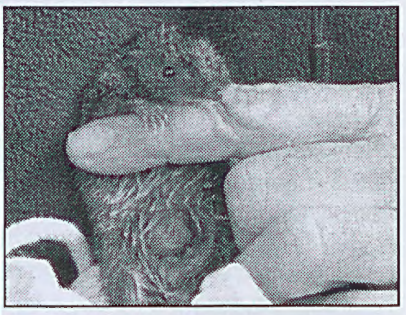
Swamp Rat *Rattus lutreolus* 3 adults, trap 37 (28/08/10), 15 (29/08/10), 39 (29/08/10).

House Mouse *Mus musculus* 5 adults, trap 2 (27/08/10), 2 (28/08/10), 39 (28/08/10), 6 (29/08/10) and 38 (29/08/10).



Step 1: Trevor mixes the bait of oatmeal, honey and peanut butter.

Step 2: The bait is rolled into small balls. One ball is added to each Elliott Trap.



A female Dusky Antechinus with young in the pouch.

A Swamp Rat

Mammal list

Dusky Antechinus: one caught.
Koala: one road-killed near the reserve over-night (29/08/10), and many scats found although no live animals were seen.
Common Brushtail Possum: the remains of one recently road-killed near the reserve.
Eastern Grey Kangaroo: one seen.
Black Wallaby: several seen.
House Mouse: 5 trapped.
Swamp Rat: 3 trapped.
Red Fox: one seen, scent noted in several places.
Deer species: scats noted.
European Rabbit: scats and scrapes noted.
(In the 1990s, the reserve was the site of the release of a number of the endangered Eastern Barred Bandicoot as part of the species Recovery Plan. Although initially successful, with breeding recorded, the numbers began to fall and the last known individual was trapped and relocated to another site.)

Herps list:

Common Froglet: many calling from wet areas.
Striped Marsh Frog: a few calling, one found under a sheet of iron.

Bird list:

Although no systematic listing was done, the following birds were recorded:

Australian Shelduck
Australian Wood Duck
Chestnut Teal
White-faced Heron
Grey (White) Goshawk
Wedge-tailed Eagle
Galah
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo
Crimson Rosella
Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo
Shining Bronze-Cuckoo
Fan-tailed Cuckoo
Laughing Kookaburra
White-throated Treecreeper
White-browed Scrubwren
Brown Thornbill
Striated Pardalote
Yellow-faced Honeyeater
Red Wattlebird
New Holland Honeyeater
Golden Whistler
Grey Shrike-thrush
Australian Magpie
Pied Currawong
Grey Currawong
Grey Fantail
Raven sp.
Common Blackbird
Common Starling

Thanks to Lorraine, Frances, Nat and her two children Ammie and Travis, for their help in setting and checking the traps.

Reference:

DCE (1990) *Floating Islands Nature Reserve Proposed Management Plan.*

Photos: Trevor Pescott and Lorraine Phelan

Striped Marsh Frog at Floating Island Reserve Photo: Trevor Pescott

Walking the mammal trap transept at Floating Islands Reserve.

Each mammal is weighed then released.

A basalt rise in Floating Islands Reserve

Mammal report

...Trevor Pescott

Mammal Atlas additions

Platypus	1	08/08/10	Barham River just above Apollo Bay.	TP
Agile Antechinus	1	30/07/10	Yaugher.	TP
Common Wombat	1	30/07/05	Long Forest, in private garden.	MHe
Koala	1	16/07/10	Ocean Grove Nature Reserve.	GMc
Common Brushtail Possum	3	09/04/10	Whinray Road, Meredith.	WCo
Common Brushtail Possum	2	11/07/10	You Yangs.	EWt
Sugar Glider	1	03/07/10	Whinray Road, Meredith.	WCo
Common Ringtail Possum	1	14/05/10	Whinray Road, Meredith.	WCo
Common Ringtail Possum	2	03/07/10	Whinray Road, Meredith.	WCo
Eastern Grey Kangaroo	15+	27/07/10	Karaaf Wetlands, Breamlea.	SQu
Red-necked Wallaby	1	20/07/10	Serendip Sanctuary.	EWt
Black Wallaby	1	02/07/10	Turntable Drive, You Yangs.	EWt
Flying-fox sp.	2	17/06/10	Eclipse Ck, Whinray Rd, Meredith.	WCo
Feral Cat	1	08/08/10	Yaugher.	TP
Seal sp.	4	12/08/10	Off Point Addis.	AMi
Fallow Deer	2	21/06/10	Stony Ck Reservoirs, Brisbane Ranges.	CCo
Fallow Deer	2	16/07/10	Slate Quarry Rd, Brisbane Ranges.	CCo
Fallow Deer	5+	26/07/10	Eclipse Rd, Brisbane Ranges.	WCo

Observers: Ami, Anthony Mitchell; CCo, Colin Cook; EWt, Echidna Walkabout (Janine Duffy); GMc, Gordon McCarthy; MHe, Marilyn Hewish; SQu, Stuart Quick; TP, Trevor Pescott; WCo, Wendy Cook.

Agile Antechinus: an adult male, it was found dead on the floor of the garden shed at Yaugher. There was no evidence of any injury so he was presumably the victim of the annual male die-off after mating.

Common Wombat: the record is five years old, but there is no doubt about the animal being seen—it was supported by a photograph! Unfortunately, also in the picture is the family dog so it seems that the wombat had at one time been a pet that had been dumped or escaped. We have sightings of wombats from Little River, Brisbane Ranges and near Anglesea, and there is a colony in the Lerderderg Gorge.

Common Brushtail Possum: the two animals that Janine Duffy recorded were outside, or partly outside, the tree-hollows. She noted that the first, seen off Red Gum Gully at the You Yangs, appeared right out and only climbed in when disturbed, while the second seen off Big Rock Track was half in the hollow, but with his back exposed. It was a warm day after a series of very cold weather. Perhaps, as Janine suggests, they were trying to warm up after the chill.

Sugar Glider: gliders are not often seen, so this record is particularly interesting. Wendy Cook noted – *I heard a rustle, then a thump, and spotted the Sugar Glider on a branch. It walked and jumped along connecting branches to another tree.* This was at 7.00pm on a cool night with rain drizzle.

Eastern Grey Kangaroo: although Stuart Quick had seen three kangaroos intermittently over the previous hour, this surprisingly large mob was not noted until disturbed by someone walking through the wetland, driving them past where he was working.

Black Wallaby: the animal, noted at the You Yangs on 02/07/10, was a young male that, according to the observer Janine Duffy, was acting in an unusual manner. He was sniffing the ground and hopping around excitedly presumably picking up a scent, possibly of a female or a rival male.

Fallow Deer: Wendy and Colin Cook live on the edge of the Brisbane Ranges so are well able to keep tabs on the local wildlife. Their observations of deer over June-July suggest the animals are becoming more abundant, or are moving out of the forest and pine plantations in winter. The potential for causing damage to the vegetation if their numbers continue to increase must be of concern to park managers.

Pixcontroller cameras

The Club's three PixController movement-activated cameras have been in operation at a number of sites during the last two months. The sites include Marengo, Upper Barham River valley and the Stony Rises. The results will be collated and included in the Mammal Report in the October *Geelong Naturalist*.

They will be used again on the Barham site in our continuing quest for quoll sightings, then placed on John Berry's property at Yaugher prior to the biodiversity day on 17 October.

Trevor sets up a PixController camera at Floating Islands Reserve.
Photo: Lorraine Phelan

Bellarine Peninsula Orange-bellied Parrot (OBP) Working Group report

...Craig Morley

The highlight of the July survey was undoubtedly the discovery of five Orange-bellied Parrots on Duck Island.

The birds were found by Rod Beazley and Graeme Willson from Parks Victoria who surveyed the island, on 22 July, as part of the coordinated effort. Rod and Graeme returned to the island, four days later, with three volunteers and the author. We were thrilled to confirm the presence of an adult male, adult female, two juveniles and a fifth bird.

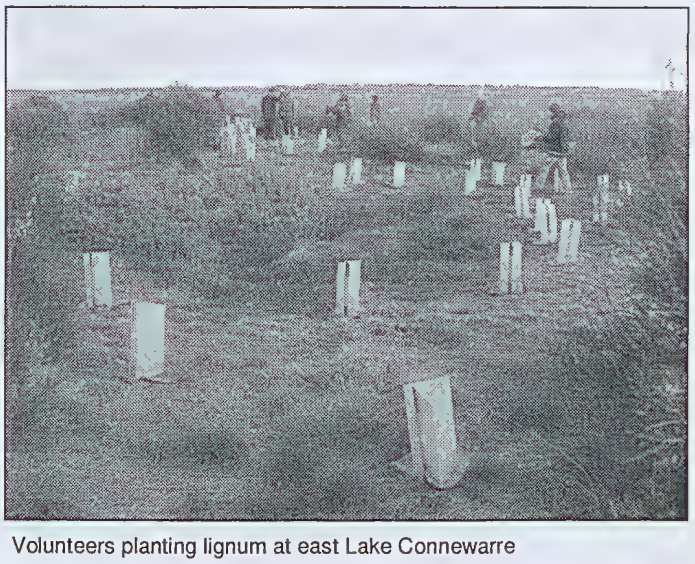
Subsequent visits confirmed that OBPs were using the island. On 3 August, four observers were on the island from 0940 h to 1740 h and saw five birds return to the island late in the day, feed for about an hour in the fading light and then a few minutes after sunset, bolt for a roost on the island. Then on 9 August, four observers returned to the island at 0740 h, not long after sunrise in heavily overcast weather. We searched all over the island several times, until 1315 h, but alas the OBPs were not there. On 17 August, four observers returned to the island at 1500 h searched the island thoroughly and found no OBPs. We then stationed ourselves at the most likely 'fly-in' points on the island. A similar strategy was used successfully on the earlier visit. We waited and waited then, ten minutes after sunset in the fading light and the cold, three OBPs flew in from the north low over the water rose vertically as they made land-fall and then rapidly flew to the area of the island where they presumably roost. We left the island in darkness at 1800 h.

On behalf of the Bellarine Peninsula Working Group and Orange-bellied Parrot Recovery Team the author would like to sincerely thank staff from Parks Victoria and the Department of Sustainability and Environment for their willingness to assist with the survey effort and their expertise in transporting observers to the island.

In the last few weeks several observers have made careful and extensive but fruitless searches of Edwards Point. This is presumably one of the localities that the Duck Island OBPs have been using. This is a difficult area which needs a lot of care and preparation as long walks are involved and there is limited access to certain areas, especially if the tide is up. We intend to keep an eye on this region, including the Defence Force land at Queenscliff, in coming weeks.

A total of 167 Blue-winged Parrots were recorded across six localities during the July survey.

It was also really pleasing that many eager and enthusiastic souls ventured forth on 14 August to plant 300 lignum cuttings at east Lake Connewarre. These lignums were propagated by Graeme Stockton from cuttings taken on site and planted in the Parks Victoria Barwon Parklands community grant project to provide roosting habitat for *Neophema* parrots.



Volunteers planting lignum at east Lake Connewarre

September surveys...

If you would like to assist with the OBP surveys on the week-end of 11–12 September please let Craig know ASAP on 5221 4604 or craigmorley5@bigpond.com

Free Hooded Plover workshops

The Hooded Plover is a charismatic little character that lives and nests on your local ocean beach. If you would like to learn more about this vulnerable bird and be a part of the conservation solution, then come along to a workshop. Learn about the Beach-nesting Birds project and how to safely monitor nests as part of the project. All welcome!

Anglesea
Date: 10 a.m. Saturday 4 September
Location: ANGAIR meeting room on McMillanStreet (then to Point Roadknight)

Apollo Bay
Date: 10 a.m. Saturday 18 September
Location: Football club social rooms at the Apollo Bay Recreation Reserve Caravan Park (then to Barham River Estuary)

Bellarine Peninsula
Date: 10 a.m. Sunday 19 September
Location: Breamlea Environmental Centre at Caravan Park (then along the beach behind the park)

Each workshop will begin with an indoors introduction, followed by a beach visit, lasting approximately two hours. Please bring along wet weather gear, sun protection (be prepared for any weather!) and binoculars if you have them.

Please contact Meghan Cullen at Birds Australia for more specific information and to register for attending a workshop: <m.cullen@birdsaustralia.com.au>

Plant Group report

...Polly Cutcliffe

Books, photos, plant material, personal observations, the internet and use of the microscope all contributed to the workshop.

Discussed were orchids flowering at Inverleigh Flora and Fauna Reserve, namely *Cyrtostylis reniformis, Corybas incurvis, C. diemenicus* and *Pterostylis concinna*. Also at Inverleigh Flora and Fauna Reserve was *Ophioglossum lusitanicum* Austral Adder's-tongue. Several garden specimens were identified.

Also discussed were leaf domatia (minute structures found on the undersides of some leaves, in the vein axils) which are used as refuges by tiny organisms such as mites. The mutually beneficial nature of this association was discussed, and domatia on the leaves of the introduced Mirror Bush *Coprosma repens* examined under the microscope.

This month

...Joe Hubbard

From Belmont
On this cold, foggy morning it arrived at our front door.
We were alerted to this by a door knock. Most callers use the doorchimes but a door knock means something else, especially at this time of day. Most times it is parcel post delivering a book or DVD from UK—and so it was this morning.

Today it is a book, titled *At the Water's Edge* by the Scottish writer John Lister-Kaye. The blurb informs me that the author, over a period of 30 years, took a regular, circular walk from his home in a valley up to a small hill loch. On return he recorded in his journal any new observations and experiences. This formed the basis for this book—an eclectic collection.

I'm an inveterate riffler of new books and soon found some interesting titbits such as a friend of the author who recovers roadkilled cats, game birds which are eaten whole (cooked I hope) with worm and bug-filled guts, the ascent of man at the expense of the natural world, and waiting for daybreak with the robins. I can't wait to get started.

To the Plains!
What do you get from a huge chicken processing plant, a straight unmade country lane used for exercising greyhounds, two galahs and a raptor. An interesting morning of course! Well, maybe leave out the first two items.

Now, about those galahs. They were clinging to the trunk of a large tree at the lower end of a large scar. (See photo.) Now what they were doing was puzzling—well at least to us. They scraped with beaks within the scarred area and then appeared to 'wipe' their beaks on their plumage. This went on for some time until I got out of the car and, of course, spooked them. Were they digging out a nesting hollow?

From puzzling to exciting, well for me anyway—the raptor! Cameron had told me about the two raptors he had noticed whilst running the dogs. Apparently they put on quite a performance with the two of them flying high, calling, swooping each other then returning to land in a stubbled field. As soon as we turned into 'his' lane there was one of them, a Black Falcon, perched on a fence post, observing, with plenty to keep it interested. There were many magpies and ravens scattered across the fields. These were soon to become unwilling participants in the drama that followed.

While we watched, the falcon took off, flew over the feeding birds, stooped at a magpie, missed. The startled bird was put to flight and the chase was on, twisting, turning, weaving, with both birds 'flat out'. I felt sure the magpie would succumb to this great aerialist but no, the falcon was outmanoeuvred and gave up.

All this happened so quickly, you might say in a space of seconds and you wouldn't be exaggerating.

Several times all this action was repeated—sometimes several magpies were involved—with all the chases ending unsuccessfully.

This was exciting stuff. We watched, fascinated by these unfolding events, until the falcon flew off empty-taloned. Later, in this same area, we saw a falcon in a distant field which appeared to be eating. We hoped it was our falcon. Enjoy!
On reflection—was our falcon disadvantaged by the flat, open terrain here at Moolort Plains—you know, the surprise, ambush factor? And how did it know just when to call off the chase? So as to conserve energy?

But I tell you what—it was great to see the magpies on the receiving end for a change!

A guide for September—an Anglesea-heathland diary entry
At first glance the heathland appears devoid of colour—a greyish -green uniformity of low shrubs and grasses.

It didn't take long to find the first orchid—a wallflower, and aptly named too. With eyes in, more were found including dense colonies of the yellow Rabbit Ears orchid and the discovery, by Val, of a blue Sun Orchid holding several flowers above the low vegetation then more dotted through the heath.

Sun Orchid

All this, and the song of a Striated Fieldwren from its perch on a prominent shrub—how evocative it is!

Welcome Swallows patrolled and two Richards Pipit walked with us, well in front of us, for a short distance—welcome company.
In the stunted woodland of Messmate Stringybarks a few Austral Grasstrees were flowering and these attracted numerous Australian Admiral Butterflies. One shouldn't, couldn't, ignore the daisy bushes (Cypress) bearing hundreds of small flowers. At another place we found Plumed Greenhoods—the wind-blown plumes attracted our attention.

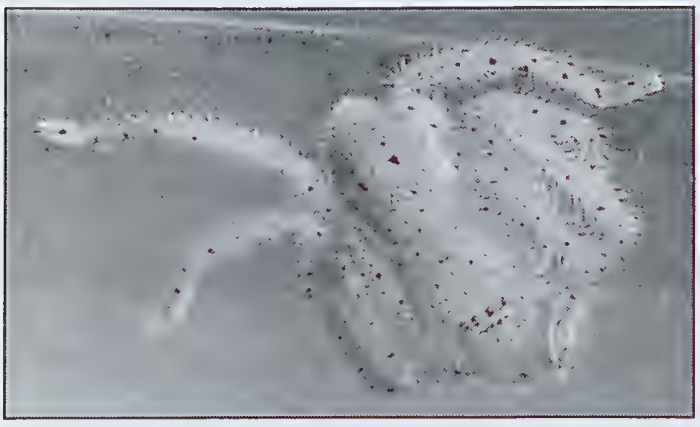
To get you going
As you can see, Anglesea is the place to go for a rewarding ramble. Purnell Street will take you to the heathlands that I described. Later, you could take Noble Street into Harvey Street for a bit of nose-following until you find the bush. Another good spot is off O'Donohue Road. (*Melways* 514)
Cheers!

What else has been seen

...Lorraine Phelan

A **Badge Spider** has been living under the rim of the rain gauge at Yaugher for a couple of months. If the present rainfall pattern persists, it may have to learn how to swim! (TP)

One **Little Eagle** kept circling over us as we worked on boneseed pulling at Belchers' Trust for Nature-covenanted land at the Dog Rocks on 22/08/10, taking full advantage of the strong wind rising out of the Moorabool valley—a light morph bird. (TP)

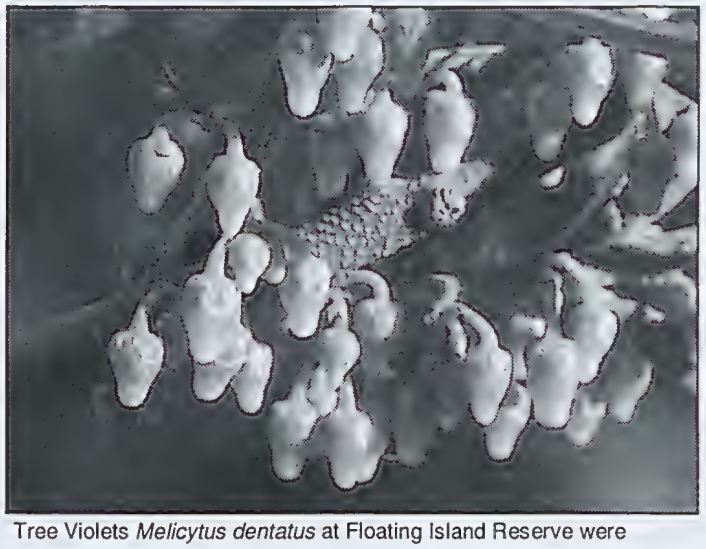


Badge Spider, Yaugher. Photo: TrevorPescott

Little Eagle, Dog Rocks. Photo: TrevorPescott

Over 50 **Dark Vegetable Caterpillar fungi *Cordyceps gunnii*** growing under Moonahs in the Point Lonsdale cemetery reserve. These club-like fungi grow 120 mm high and are parasitic on underground moth larvae. (RSm)

Cordyceps gunnii, Point Lonsdale Photo: Rosalind Smallwood



Tree Violets *Melicytus dentatus* at Floating Island Reserve were covered in flower buds last week. Photo: Lorraine Phelan

Observers: Lorraine Phelan; RSm, Rosalind Smallwood; TP, Trevor Prescott

Vale Ira Savage

With the passing of Ira Savage on 17 August, the GFNC has lost one of its best known and respected members.

One Saturday morning late in 1969, Ira with his family, sat in their car at the beachfront between Yarra Street and Cunningham Piers, feeding the local gulls with bread scraps. One of the birds that landed on the car bonnet had a metal ring around each leg. Intrigued, Ira contacted me, and I was able to put him in touch with David Purchase at the CSIRO bird-banding scheme headquarters. For the next two years, Ira spent hours on the beachfront, sitting on his camp stool, reading through binoculars the numbers on the gull bands. In that time he read no less than 947 band numbers, the most of any amateur in Australia at the time.

Writing in the November 1972 issue *of Geelong Naturalist*, Ira described those years as 'well spent, as I learned a lot and made many friends—and gave many impromptu lectures to those interested who happened to be around.' Ira became an active member of the GFNC, and participated in many of the Club's day trips and excursions. He was passionate about Mud Islands and worked on the clearing of boxthorn and other weeds, particularly at the tern nesting sites. He also joined the Victorian wader study group and regularly travelled to Broome Observatory and to other places where shorebirds were being banded. In the December 1994 issue of *Geelong Naturalist* he co-authored an article on the Song Thrush; in his introduction to the article, Ture Hergstrom, then-President of the GFNC, described Ira as 'a long time member and very active and widely travelled birdwatcher.'

Ira's other passion was steam engines, and he was a member of the Geelong Steam Preservation society that began building a track across the Belmont Common before moving their activities to Queenscliff.

At the funeral service, Graeme Tribe spoke on behalf of the Club, describing some of the trips he took with Ira and other Club members.

Trevor Pescott

Book review—*Boom and Bust: Bird Stories for a Dry Country*

...Lorraine Phelan

Semi-arid desert covers seventy per cent of Australia and the rains, and the time between the rains, are unpredictable and irregular and the desert birds have adapted their behaviours. We Australians, the writers in *Boom and Bust: Bird Stories for a Dry Country* contend, must also adapt to changes in the future.

Boom and Bust is a collection of twelve chapters, each covering a desert bird species, each written by a different author. Most of the authors are 'practising field specialists' (as the publisher's blurb states). We learn of the 'boom' breeding and migration habits of the Zebra Finch, woodswallows, Black-tailed Native Hens, Brolgas, Eastern Koels, White-winged Choughs, Channel-billed Cuckoos, Emus and pelicans as they respond to rain events followed by the 'bust' of droughts and changes in vegetation. Topics discussed include the relationship between Aboriginals and birds (the 'rain birds' such as the koel that offer signs of environmental fluctuation) and the effect of European settlement on birds (the fences erected to restrict the movements of the nomadic emu responding to environmental change). The gang warfare of the choughs is used to predict the behaviour of humans in a future of limited resources and we even learn about the unfortunate Genyornis that couldn't adapt to changes and is now extinct.

The book generated a lively and wide-ranging discussion at Eco Book Group. We agreed that that it would appeal to readers beyond the bird-watching fraternity, that it was a beautifully presented book and that the referencing at the end of each chapter would be very useful for further research. This book was a delight to read and it was not a surprise to learn that it had been awarded the 2009 Whitley Medal.

Libby Robin, Robert Heinsohn and Leo Joseph (eds)(2009) *Boom and Bust: Bird Stories for a Dry Country, CSIRO*

Advance notice

Eco Book Group

Tuesday 30 November 2010

The Blue Plateau: A Landscape Memoir
by Mark Tredinnick

Winner of the 2010 Queensland Premier's Literary Award, non-fiction category.

Bird Observations July–August 2010

...Barry Lingham

Much of the information we have gathered about the migration flyways and important feeding sites of the migratory waders has come from careful observation of birds that have been banded. The Australasian Wader Studies Group has been carrying out banding programs since the early 1980s. As well as migratory waders, some banding of endemic waders has also been undertaken, including work on the Australian Pied Oystercatcher. Rob Ganly noted an oystercatcher with a white flag at Avalon and discovered that the bird had originally been banded on 30/03/2007 at Long Island, Hastings in Western Port Bay when it was three years old. This is the first recorded sighting of the bird since that date.

The AWSG has requested that any Pied Oystercatcher banding sightings be forwarded to them, even if the observations are incomplete. This means the old-style 2-leg colour coding as well as the new flag identification. Rob is collating any local records of banded birds and will pass them on to the AWSG.

As winter draws to a close, we await the return of the spring migrants. Short-tailed Shearwaters usually arrive in Bass Strait from the northern hemisphere at the end of September, but at least one bird has arrived early, at Point Addis on 12/8/10. The Dusky Woodswallow at the You Yangs on 28/7/10 may have been an early return, but occasionally some birds overwinter in the area.

We continue to have many reports of Swift Parrots. However, Orange-bellied Parrots, the other Tasmanian parrot that over-winters on the mainland, have suffered severe population declines in the past few years. That is why Craig Morley, the Bellarine Peninsula Orange-bellied Parrot Working Group Co-ordinator, has been working with volunteers monitoring a small group in the Swan Bay area. The five birds seen represent about 10% of the entire wild population.

White-fronted Terns have not been reported very often this year, so it is nice to note some seen at Point Addis. This species usually leaves around October to breed in NZ and sub-Antarctic islands, although a few breed in the Furneaux islands off Tasmania.

The robins are always a favourite of many birdwatchers, but few people get to see them in their home garden. The Rose Robin in Rob Ganly's Newtown Garden was a special treat.

September Bird Group meeting: Trevor Pescott is the speaker. His topic is 'Ethical Birdwatching' and it will cover the activities that birdwatchers can undertake without undue disturbance of birds. This is particularly relevant with the boom in the numbers of bird photographers with the advent of cheaper digital SLRs and the general increase in the numbers of birdwatchers. Other birdwatchers regularly use audio playback—how much is too much or too loud?

The following observations are a selection of those submitted. All observations will be published in *Geelong Bird Report.*

Observers: AM, Anthony Mitchell; CMo, Craig Morley; EWt, Echidna Walkabout; HSc, Helen Schofield; JN, John Newman; KC, Kay Campbell; RGa, Rob Ganly; SQ, Stuart Quick; TFl, Tom Fletcher; TMc, Tim McKellar

Species	Number	Date	Comment	Observers
Australasian Shoveler	1+	3/8/2010	Serendip, a male.	EWt
Common Bronzewing	1	28/7/2010	You Yangs, Hovell's Creek area.	SQ
Crested Pigeon	30+	23/7/2010	North Shore. Sitting on power lines.	RGa, CMo
	7	25/7/2010	Lake Connewarre. In lignum in middle of saltmarsh, a long way from any trees/paddocks.	JN
Australian Owlet-nightjar	1	15/8/2010	You Yangs, in hollow in large dead eucalypt.	EWt
Black-browed Albatross	1	12/8/2010	Pt Addis. Noted during a two hour watch.	AM, KC
Shy Albatross	5	12/8/2010	Pt Addis. Noted during a two hour watch.	AM, KC
Yellow-nosed Albatross	2	12/8/2010	Pt Addis. Noted during a two hour watch.	AM, KC
Giant-Petrel sp.	1	12/8/2010	Pt Addis. Immature. Not often seen here.	AM, KC
Short-tailed Shearwater	1	12/8/2010	Pt Addis. Early Return.	AM, KC
Fluttering Shearwater	50+	12/8/2010	Pt Addis. Noted during a two hour watch.	AM, KC
Nankeen Night Heron	1	26/7/2010	Batesford, Moorabool River Reserve.	SQ
Yellow-billed Spoonbill	1	5/8/2010	Serendip.	EWt
Whistling Kite	1	26/7/2010	Batesford, Moorabool River Reserve.	SQ
	2	26/7/2010	You Yangs, Hovell's Creek area.	SQ
	2+	3/8/2010	Serendip.	EWt
Collared Sparrowhawk	1	31/7/2010	Marcus Hill, Marcus Hill tennis courts, patrolling the trees.	JN
Wedge-tailed Eagle	1	29/7/2010	Mt Rothwell.	EWt
	6	30/7/2010	You Yangs, two pairs in courtship flights.	EWt
Little Eagle	1	1/8/2010	You Yangs. Also 3/8 & 9/8.	EWt
Nankeen Kestrel	1	29/7/2010	Mt Rothwell.	EWt
Brown Falcon	1	3/8/2010	Hospital Swamp. At the end of Belchers Lane. A pair of Black-shouldered Kite and a pair of Brown Falcon vigorously attacked a Swamp Harrier that was passing through. I witnessed the same thing last Saturday.	TFI
Peregrine Falcon	2	29/7/2010	Ripley Rd, Little River.	EWt
Lewin's Rail	1	3/8/2010	Hospital Swamp. Tim called into Hospital Swamps and at the end of the track played a few rail/crake calls. He got an immediate response from a Lewin Rail!	TFI, TMc
Australian Pied Oystercatcher	7	23/7/2010	Cheetham Avalon saltworks. Including one female with a White flag—A8.	RGa, CMo
Black-winged Stilt	27	23/7/2010	Cheetham Avalon saltworks. Including many juveniles.	RGa, CMo
Red-capped Plover	60+	23/7/2010	Cheetham Avalon saltworks.	RGa, CMo
Double-banded Plover	38	23/72010	Cheetham Avalon saltworks. Including 20 in partial breeding plumage & 10 complete.	RGa, CMo
Red-necked Stint	68	23/7/2010	Cheetham Avalon saltworks.	RGa, CMo
Little Tern	1	23/7/2010	Cheetham Avalon saltworks.	RGa, CMo
Fairy Tern	10	23/7/2010	Cheetham Avalon saltworks.	RGa, CMo
White-fronted Tern	30+	12/8/2010	Pt Addis. Noted during a two hour watch.	AM, KC
Crested Tern	3	12/8/2010	Pt Addis. Noted during a two hour watch.	AM, KC
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	2	11/8/2010	You Yangs, appear to be nesting.	EWt
Purple-crowned Lorikeet	2	25/7/2010	Stewarts Reserve.	JN
	3	26/7/2010	Batesford, Moorabool River Reserve.	SQ
Swift Parrot	90+	5/8/2010	You Yangs, Information Centre area at 0720.	CMo, RGa
	35+	5/8/2010	Meredith, Sharps Road.	CMo, RGa
	8	5/8/2010	Meredith, Sharps Crossing, Moorabool River.	CMo, RGa
	6+	28/7/2010	You Yangs, Eastern paddock/Toynes Road area.	JN
Orange-bellied Parrot	5	26/7/2010	Swan Bay. Birds noted in the area.	Per CMo
Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo	3	25/7/2010	Lake Connewarre, Southern shore. Calling.	JN
Shining Bronze-Cuckoo	2	8/8/2010	Edwards Point. Calling.	JN
Fan-tailed Cuckoo	1	20/7/2010	Point Lonsdale. Calling from flowering eucalypts.	HSc
	2	25/7/2010	Stewarts Reserve. Still calling.	JN
	1	8/8/2010	Edwards Point. Calling.	JN
	1	9/8/2010	You Yangs, S of Toynes Rd.	EWt
Laughing Kookaburra	2	26/7/2010	Batesford, Moorabool River Reserve.	SQ
	2	28/7/2010	You Yangs, Hovell's Creek area.	SQ
Brown Treecreeper	2	28/7/2010	You Yangs, Hovell's Creek area.	SQ
Striated Fieldwren	32	28/7/2010	Cheetham Avalon saltworks. Extremely high number.	RGa.,CMo
Brown Thornbill	2	23/7/2010	Cheetham Avalon saltworks. A first for this site.	RGa, CMo
Eastern Spinebill	1	3/8/2010	You Yangs. Also one on 15/8/2010.	EWt
Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater	1	28/7/2010	You Yangs, Eastern paddock/Toynes Road area. 1 E of Information Centre on 5/8.	JN, EWt
White-naped Honeyeater	25	26/7/2010	Batesford, Moorabool River Reserve.	SQ
Olive-backed Oriole	Several	3/8/2010	Serendip.	EWt
Dusky Woodswallow	1	28/7/2010	You Yangs, Eastern paddock/Toynes Road area.	JN
Jacky Winter	2	28/7/2010	You Yangs, Hovell's Creek area.	SQ
Scarlet Robin	3	9/8/2010	You Yangs, nesting in a wattle.	EWt
Flame Robin	5	28/7/2010	You Yangs, Hovell's Creek area.	SQ
Rose Robin	1	26/7/2010	Newtown. A beautiful male flitting through grevilleas in a suburban garden.	Per RGa
Diamond Firetail	1	28/7/2010	You Yangs, Eastern paddock/Toynes Road area.	JN

Mid-week Bird Group Excursion

Thursday 23 September 2010

Brisbane Ranges

Leader: Craig Morley

This excursion will provide an opportunity to have a leisurely walk through the newly proclaimed portion of the Brisbane Ranges National Park (formerly Barwon Water reserve).

Meet: 9:00 a.m. at Anakie General store car-park, then drive to Switch Rd. and down to Lower Stony Creek picnic ground. We will leave half the cars at this point and then drive to the entrance for the new section of National Park, on Anakie-Ballan Rd.

We will then walk back to the Lower Stony Creek picnic ground through the new section of National Park. Please have your requirements (food, drinks etc.) packed so that you can carry them with you on the walk or leave them in a car at the Lower Stony Creek picnic ground to return to for lunch/morning tea.

Finish: approximately 1.00 p.m.

Bring: Lunch and drinks to carry. We will have lunch/morning tea along the creek. In addition bring sunscreen, hat, raingear, warm jacket and sturdy walking shoes/boots.

Enquiries: Craig 5221 4604, Polly 5244 0182

Great Otways Thismia Hunt (GOTH)

Sat 30 Oct–Mon 1 Nov 2010

Leaders: Trevor Pescott and Rosalind Smallwood

Updated program: Our group will meet Trevor for BYO lunch at 12 noon on Saturday in the Blanketleaf Picnic Area, Erskine Falls Rd, above Lorne.

After lunch we will search nearby for *Thismia rodwayi* plants where they were found last year and hopefully collect a specimen for the Herbarium. Depending on our success we may then move on to other locations. NB: BYO gardening gloves, kneelers if required, mosquito repellent, etc.

The group will meet again on Sunday outside the community hall in Forrest for 9.30 a.m. departure to search more locations, returning to Forrest by 4 p.m. BYO lunch, plus morning and afternoon tea. A decision will be made on Sunday about Monday morning activities.

Some accommodation is still available at Barramunga Cabins for Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights but **bookings must be made by next Fri (Sept 10) with Rosalind Smallwood (5258 2660).**

GFNC Excursion

Sunday 19 September 2010

Brisbane Ranges

Leader: John Bell

The meeting place will be the Bert Boardman Reserve near Steiglitz which is on the Geelong side of the Steiglitz Courthouse. It is a good area to walk and there are toilets there. We are aiming for a 10 a.m. start.

From there we will move to the corner of Butcher's road and the Geelong/Ballan road. There is space to park the cars and we will walk the firebreak area. This is a great place to see many species of flora and the ground is fairly level with a good walking track.

Once we finish exploring this area we will travel to the Stony Creek Picnic Area (about 12.30) for lunch and toilets are available. Take care on the drive into this area.

Once we have completed lunch Kathy Power and Parks Victoria Ranger Judy Locke will lead us on a walk into the newly opened area that used to be managed by Barwon Water.

The areas we are visiting are all recovering from the 2006 bushfires and we will be able to gauge what has recovered and what is still struggling.

Meet: At the Bert Boardman Reserve at 10.00 a.m. (As we are not using the Botanic Gardens meeting spot for this excursion, please organise your own car pooling.)

Bring: Appropriate footwear; wet weather gear; binoculars and cameras; morning tea and snacks as well food and drink for lunch.

Contact: John Bell, 5261 3543.

Advance notice

Wider Geelong Flora Lecture

Tuesday 12 October 2010

Estuarine health

Speaker: Rhys Collins, CCMA

Mailing roster

September: David Flanagan
October: Joan & Tibor Korn

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" "	Peter Williams	5221 3503	peter.w@westnet.com.au

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP CONVENERS and OTHER CLUB POSITIONS

Belmont Escarpment Group	Dick Southcombe	5243 3916
Bird Group	Barry Lingham	5255 4291
Conservation Group	Bruce Lindsay	5223 2394
Editor	Lorraine Phelan	5243 0636
Sub-editor	Deborah Evans	5243 8687
Geelong Bird Report	Marilyn Hewish	5367 3196
Jerringot Group	Valda Dedman	5243 2374
Librarian	Lorraine Phelan	5243 0636
Fauna Survey Group	Trevor Pescott	5243 4368
Membership Officer	Peter Williams	5221 3503
Plant Group	Dick Southcombe	5243 3916
Web-master	Barry Lingham	5255 4291
Eco Book Group	Lorraine Phelan	5243 0636

Coming events

SEPTEMBER 2010

7 General Meeting: Brisbane Ranges (before & after fires)—Kathy Powers
11–12 Orange-bellied Parrot Survey—Craig Morley
14 Plant Group: Workshop Meeting
16 Bird Group: Ethical Birdwatching—Trevor Pescott
19 Excursion: Brisbane Ranges
Leader: Kathy Powers
23 Mid-week Bird Group Excursion

OCTOBER 2010

5 General Meeting: Bees—John Edmonds
12 Plant Group: Wider Geelong Flora Lecture
15–18 SEANA Campout: Latrobe Valley FNC host club
17 Excursion / Biodiversity Survey—Yaugher (John Berry property) Leader: TBA
21 Bird Group: Meeting
TBA Mammal Group: Survey
28 Mid-week Bird Group Excursion

Did you know?

- The number of surveys submitted to the Atlas of Australian Birds Project has reached the 500 000 milestone.
- The Fungi Group of the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria found 210 species of fungi in the Otways in early May 2010. (*Field Nats News*, No. 200)
- The six books that make up the shortlist for the Royal Society Prize are listed at http://royalsociety.org/Royal-Society-Prize-for-Science-Books-2010-shortlist-announced/

The closing date for the next magazine will be <u>Monday evening 27 September 2010</u>.

Early lodgement of articles (small & large) would be a great help—late copy may not be accepted.
Hard copy or email (Word document or .rtf please).
Photographs—digital as .jpg (100 to 250 KB approx. if sending by e-mail), slides or prints for scanning to the Editor Lorraine Phelan: lphelan@bigpond.com.au

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GFNC meetings are held at Geelong Botanic Gardens Friends Room, and start at 8.00 p.m.

Entrance is at the intersection of Holt Rd and Eastern Park Circuit in Eastern Park. [*Melway* 452 G4]

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